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Kyoto University
RECONSTRUCTING THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE G/UI AND G//ANA BUSHMEN

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ABSTRACT The G/ui and the G//ana, the Central Kalahari Bushman, were said to have had little contact with other ethnic groups, and lived self-sufficiently on traditional hunting and gathering until the 1960’s. But they acknowledge that a Tswana man came to the Bushman’s land about a century ago and brought agriculture and livestock-farming to the G/ui and the G//ana. He also introduced chiefdom and made the Bushmen pay tribute to the Tswana. Because of this tribute and the fact that some Bushmen were treated as serfs by the Tswana, the Tswana regard all Bushmen as the lowest class even today. In contrast, the G/ui and the G//ana do not recognize themselves as subordinate to the Tswana. Due to egalitarianism that permeates throughout their basic lifestyle, the concept of chiefdom did not truly penetrate their society. Only the chief’s family members paid tribute and to most G/ui and G//ana this tribute was just a part of trade.

Key Words: G/ui; G//ana; Twana; Interethnic relationship; Recent history

INTRODUCTION

The study on the Kalahari hunter-gatherers often causes controversy between traditionalists and revisionists. The traditionalist view is that the hunter-gatherer society has maintained its cultural originality by keeping no contact with neighboring other peoples. On the other hand, the revisionists insist that the hunter-gatherers came to being because they were left out by development, and consider their lifestyle as a new phenomenon of the past century (Wilmsen & Denbow, 1990; Gordon, 1992). While such controversy is not the discussion here, I agree that because the traditionalist has considered the hunter-gatherer society as a closed system, they neglected to evaluate the society’s contact with other peoples.

The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct the recent history of the G/ui and G//ana Bushmen, who have resided in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Unfortunately the G/ui and G//ana Bushmen do not have their own oral tradition while most Bantu peoples do. To investigate what each of the Bushmen remembers is the only way to learn their history. However, the Bushmen do not concern themselves overlong about past events, nor on the other hand do they keep a constant eye trained on the future. They live thoroughly in the present (Tanaka, 1980: 110). They are optimists living only for the present. In investigating the Bushmen, it is often difficult to even judge whether an event happened yesterday or ten years ago.
The concept of number is undeveloped among the Bushman, as their language counts only to three. People do not know their ages, nor count the years even though they may understand the passage of a year. Consequently, the best approach to establishing dates is to make chronology the few significant past events from Bushmen's memory that are datable from external information (Tanaka, 1980).

In this paper I chose some events which possibly are the clues to reconstructing the G//ui and G//ana Bushmen history of the Xade area in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. I will inspect whether each of the events is valid as a historical clue or not. With historically established events before and after the clues, I have compiled the Bushman chronology in the Central Kalahari, which shed light on the relationship between the G//ui and G//ana Bushman and the Tswana.

RESEARCH AREA AND METHOD

I. Xade Area

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve, the research area, is located in the center of the Republic of Botswana (Fig. 1). The population consists of about 700 G//ui and G//ana Bushmen.

When I started my research in 1982, the waves of modernization had lapped over the interior of the Kalahari Desert. Due to the development policy of the Botswana government which started in 1979, Bushmen's traditional lifestyle has profoundly changed. The Bushmen were a hunting and gathering people who were nomadic throughout the year, moving with the seasons. A salient feature of this nomadism was the frequent change in the composition of the residential groups (Tanaka, 1980). The nomadic lifestyle has been replaced by a sedentary one around the !Koi!kom borehole. Gathering, the primary subsistence activity in Bushman traditional life, became reduced in importance. The Remote Area Development Office instead introduced farming to G//ui and G//ana Bushman in the Xade settlement.

The traditional bow and arrow hunting of the Xade people were soon replaced with using horses. On horseback, they could chase and kill big game, such as gemsbock, eland and wildebeest (Osaki, 1984). Through the process of change, they began to purchase handicrafts, buy and sell meat obtained by hunting, and worked in wage labor, and set up stores within the cooperative association. They rapidly became enmeshed in the national economy.

For detail of a series of changes in the Xade area after Bushmen started to settle down, see Osaki (1984; 1990), Imamura-Hayaki (1996), and Ikeya (1996a and b).

II. The Method of Investigation

The research in Xade settlement span from August 1995 to January 1996, from February to March in 1997, and July to August 1997. Interviews with elderly person familiar with past events and stories were taped. The content was transcribed later with the informant's help. In July, 1996, the archival research was also done in Archives of Gaborone, in the capital of the Republic of Botswana.
SOME EVENTS AS CLUES TO ESTIMATING THE CHRONOLOGY

I. Invasion of the Amandebele

In around 1815, Shaka, the king of Zulu, had a strong military, and conquered the peoples around his territory and built his powerful kingdom. Following his invasion, the movement of the peoples around his territory occurred on a large scale in southern Africa. Mzikikazi, the king of Ndebele, wanted to make a home and planned to build his kingdom in the same way that Shaka of the Amazulu had done. Milikazi led the Amakhumallo clan away from Shaka’s state and invaded Transvaal and the south-east of Botswana. His regiments invaded from Transvaal to east Botswana between 1837 and 1839 (Tlou & Campbell, 1984). Nakagawa (1996: 110) recorded an old tale by a G//ui elderly man named Horarigyo, as summarized below:

The area where some G//ana people were camping was repeatedly attacked by a violent group who even killed. They might be a Bantu group called “Kibere.” A G//ana man, called Guru, was captured, but tactfully escaped from Kibere and informed his group members of the danger.
This tale form Horarigyo was known only to a G//ana male in 1995, who knew only the latter part of the story. Nobody else remembers Horarigyo’s tale mentioned above. The old G//ana man did not experience the pillage but just heard about it form another man named Keigyom. Keigyom seemed to have been a Bantu male staying with the Bushman (Osaki, 1995). Also, the names of persons in the old tale, such as Guru, Makuuke, and Musiyachehe, are totally distinct from the names used at present by G//ui and G//ana Bushmen, and are the names of the Bantu descent. Therefore, it is probable that the above story was not a event Bushman experienced, but that of the Bantu agro-pastoral people. In such a case, the event is not fully appropriate as a clue to estimate the Bushman chronology.

II. Swarm of Locust Came: 1924-1925 (Red Locusts), 1934-1935 (Brown Locusts)

Some people in the research area remember large swarms of red locusts in 1924-1925, and those of brown locust in 1934-1935 (Osaki, 1995). According to the official document sent from Resident Magistrate to Resident Commissioner in the Archives, it often rained in Ghanzi Distinct and locusts’ damage to the crops were severe in 1934. The government of the protectorate appointed a locust officer, planned and carried out the locust extermination.

There is a anecdote in Central Kalahari (G//ana):

That year, it rained very often, and the wild watermelon bore a lot of fruit in the Central Kalahari. When a large swarm of locusts came to the area, it seemed as if black smoke had been spreading over the distant sky. Some said, “Who made the fire?” and others, “No, not fire but a large swarm of locusts.” The people thus planned to go and gather the locusts with overnight trips that spanned several days.

The method of gathering locusts is as follows. Brown locusts sleep perched in the trees at night. The women carry grass, with which their huts are usually thatched, and spread the grass under the trees where the locusts sleep. Then, they light the grass. The locusts are surprised, and jump off the trees into the fire. The dead locusts are gathered the next morning, and are roasted once more in the hot sand to be eaten.

Locusts are not regularly utilized for food. No researcher has seen them being eaten. The above method and depiction of gathering, however, tell us that the insects are a known and edible entity and that they have been utilized for food each time they came. Even among the Naron Bushmen, the old people still remember the swarms of locusts. Swarms of locusts are notorious pests for the agricultural peoples, while for the hunter-gatherers, the locusts brought on abundant food.
III. The Epidemic of Smallpox: 1950-1951

Smallpox was not endemic in southern Africa, and was brought there by white immigrants. The smallpox virus was probably introduced into the Cape with the clothes of the passengers who arrived in ships from India. The Koi possessed less resistance to the disease than the Whites, and were ravaged (Nurse & Jenkins, 1985). A smallpox epidemic ravaged the Kalahari in 1950-1951, with reportedly high mortality among the Bushman (Silberbauer, 1965).

In those days, Bushmen visited the neighboring agro-pastoral peoples mostly for trade. When they visited Tsetseng, a village of the neighboring Kgalagadi people, smallpox was rampant and there were dead bodies lying along the path. The Bushmen, who visited the village, ran back to the Central Kalahari for fear that they would also be infected. That year, there was little rain in the Central Kalahari, and wild watermelons bore fruit only in a place called Hao. The number of people gathering watermelons in Hao is said to have reached hundreds. Soon Hao also was overtaken by smallpox, and about 30% of the people died. According to an informant, a whole family fell victim to the disease, their bodies were lying around a bonfire.

In order to escape smallpox, people ran away to anywhere they could. A woman with only her baby, ran away to her native area. A family abandoned a son who had smallpox, but the sick son managed to follow the family.

The epidemic of smallpox also caused some of the Bushmen people to abandon their traditional hunting-gathering lifestyle, and to begin to work on farms owned by Whites. Many children died. Some widows and widowers married each other. It is said that the number of the population was restored in the latter half of the 1960s. The incident is still vivid in the memories of many people, who lived at that time. It is, therefore, an important calendar of event.

IV. Establishment of !Koi!kom Borehole: 1963

Silberbauer was appointed the Bushman Survey Officer of the Bechuanaland Government in 1958, and his recommendations of the Bushman Survey Report (1965) played a significant role in the pre- and post-Independence policy concerning the Bushman. Cattle were one of Botswana’s most important sources of revenue, until diamond veins were discovered and explored. The Bushman had lost their own territory and abandoned their traditional way of life as the European farming block developed. To protect the Bushman from livestock development of the Ghanzi farming block, Silberbauer recommended the establishment of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. It was opened in 1963 (Wily, 1979).

Besides G/ui and G//ana Bushmen living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, a small number of the agro-pastoral Bantu people, the Kgalagadi, kept goats and donkeys, and engaged in farming on a small-scale. They also hunted and gathered. According to the informants, Silberbauer expelled the Kgalagadi people from the reserve, and even shot their donkeys, with the reason that they should keep off the reserve, which was only for the Bushmen.
Even in those days, a small number of Bushmen owned goats and donkeys as well as dogs. Siliberbauer shot the dogs and donkeys as such domestic animals were deemed ill-suited for the Bushmen. The Bushmen who owned domestic animals established a camp for their livestock about 4 km away from their camp, and hid them there from Siliberbauer even when he visited their camp.

Siliberbauer also recommended that fifteen waterholes for the Bushman and wild games be established in the reserve, because surface water was available only for a total of 30-60 days a year. One borehole was successfully drilled at !Koi!kom, and a grant was provided by OXFAM to drill further five. However, the disappointing results of the geological survey of the area together with the difficulties in finding a competent driller for such a remote area, and the emerging preoccupation of the Geological Survey Department with drought-relief drilling, halted the project (Wily, 1979).

Siliberbauer surveyed the Central Kalahari from 1958 to 1965. His visits into the Kalahari can certainly be Bushman chronology. Especially, the event of the borehole completion in 1963 is unforgettable for the people there at that time, since water is so indispensable.

V. The Investigation by Tanaka

Tanaka researched this area from December 1966, through March 1968. He returned from April 1971 to August 1972, and from November to December 1974 (Tanaka, 1980). Because every Bushman knows the year in which Tanaka started his first investigation, the periods of his investigation are valid as clues to the Bushman chronology.

At present, the traditional hunting with bow and arrows is outdated while trap hunting is thrives. Spear hunting with dogs, hunting on horseback also thrive. Hunting on the horseback was introduced to the Bushman by the agro-pastoral Bantu people. The informant said that his brother, G//ana male, traded goats with a first horse in Xade area, and at that time Tanaka was staying in Menoatse for his first investigation. His stay there was in March, 1968 (personal communication). The horse was killed by a lion in 1983, after Sugawara and Osaki finished their investigation.

Since no permanent waterhole existed in the part of the Kalahari, it cost dearly to collect wild watermelons to give to the horse. When watermelons were running short, they took the horses to Tsetseng, a village of the agro-pastoral Bantu people where the water was available even in the dry season.

Shortly before the first horse was gained, G//ana male hunted a zebra in Tankucue with a spear. Zebras are said to have become extinct in 1970s. A few herds must have survived until 1968, but since then nobody seems to have captured a zebra.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CENTRAL KALAHARI BUSHMAN AND THE TSWANA

The oldest event in the Bushman chronology is the swarm of locusts in 1924-1925. I have attempted to reconstruct the historical situations in the Central Kalahari, before and after the locust attack, and to clarify the relation between the Tswana tribe and Bushmen.

I. Bushmen from Tswana’s Viewpoint

1. The migration of the Tswana

The Bushmen ancestors used to live widely throughout south and east Africa. In about the 15th century, however, the Bushmen moved steadily to the south since they were expelled by the Bantu, who also moved southward and finally occupied even the south, the last base of the Bushmen. Moreover, with European colonization starting in the 17th century, the Bushmen were expelled far into the Kalahari Desert, which was suitable for neither agriculture nor livestock keeping.

It was in about the 18th century that the Tswana people came to the place now called Botswana (Tswana’s country). Until then, only Bushmen had lived there. According to Tlou and Campbell (1984), the Tswana ancestors had lived in the current Transvaal region of the Republic of the South Africa until 1250. In about 1400, one of the Bantu people, the Kgalagadi, migrated to Botswana, where only the Koikoi and Bushmen lived. The Tswana ancestors began migrating to Botswana in about 1700, and they settled in the region surrounding the Kalahari Desert, suitable for agriculture, in about 1800.

During this time, through division and merger, the current eight groups of the Tswana tribe were formed: the Bakwena, the Bangwaketse, the Batawana, the Balete, the Barolong and the Batlokwa.

The genealogy of the Tswana tribe can be traced back to around 1200 in their own oral tradition.

2. The Bushmen position in the Tswana society

Each of Tswana subgroups supported a strong social structure, the head of which was called kgosi (chief). When a chief died, he was succeeded by his son or another male relative. The chief was not an omnipotent autocrat, but the political center of the tribe and also a law maker. He made the final decision on the matters concerning common interests to the people, after discussion in the court called kgotla. He acted as a priest, too, and held rain making rituals. In the Tswana society, villages were integrated by the chiefs.

According to Shapera (1937; 1953), the Tswana society used to be composed of four classes. The highest class was the noble class (dikgosana), to which the chief and his relatives belonged. The next was the popular class (badintlha or batlhanka), composed of descendants of the tribes conquered a long time ago. The third was called the migrant class (bafaladi or baagedi), the recently conquered peoples who were supposed to be admitted to the popular class in the near future. The last was
the slave class (serf) called *malata*. The slave class was composed of the descendants of Bushmen and the Kalahari tribe, conquered when the Tswana invaded the current Botswana. They were servants for the chiefs and nobles, laborers in agriculture, cattle keeping and hunting.

The financial base of the Tswana Kingdom was livestock keeping, small-scale agriculture, hunting, and gathering. The chiefs and nobles owned large cattle herds, and in addition, levied tributes from the Bayei, the Bakalanga, the Kgalagadi, and the Bushmen, who were all obedient to them. That is to say, the Tswana society was a class society. The Tswana people included the Kgalagadi tribe and Bushmen, who lost their own land, in the slave class. The Kgalagadi and Bushmen living in the Tswana territory were levied tributes such as hides by them. The Bushmen were put in the lowest class even under the Kgalagadi. It should be pointed out that the root of various problems Bushmen are facing these days is traced to the traditional class-based social structure of the Tswana.

II. The Tswana from the Bushmen Viewpoint

To what degree the Tswana governing system spread among the G//ui and G//ana Bushmen in Central Kalahari? In spite of the recent interest in the hunting and gathering societies, especially in the Bushmen history almost all of the research is based on archaeology, oral traditions of the Bantu, and old documents. As Wilmsen (1990) and Gordon (1992) themselves admit, the reconstruction of the Bushmen’s history based on their own oral history has not yet been done. In the following subsections, from the viewpoints above, I will examine the historical relationship between the G//ui and G//ana Bushmen and the Tswana people, based on the oral traditions of the Bushmen themselves.

1. G//ana and Tswana

According to Tanaka (1980), the Bantu-like chief existed originally in the traditional Bushmen society. One characteristics of the hunter-gatherer society is the principle of equality; In their society, Bushmen enact the principle of equality from their everyday eating habits to their political system, and they have never developed the system of specialized labors. They do not have leaders, who control group members over a long period, in contrast to Bantu society (Tanaka, 1980: 108).

However, there is a chief called *ayako* in the G//ui and G//ana language (kgosi in Tswana) in the Xade area. The current *ayako* (chief) system was introduced by the district commissioner in 1979, to establish local governing organization. The Bushmen, however, say that the *ayako* (chief) system was originally introduced by a man named Keigyom, who came from Molepole, the capital of the Bakwena (one of the Tswana subtribes), and that the current *ayako* is the third generation.

Keigyom migrated from Molepole to Xade area after he grew up to have had some children from several G//ana wives (Osaki, 1995). He was the first *ayako*, and could of course speak Tswana and a little G//ana. It is probable that Keigyom was not a G//ana Bushman, but rather a Tswana or Kgalagadi with close relation with the G//ana Bushmen.
Keigyom is said to have started breeding goats and cattle in the Central Kalahari, taught G//ui and G//ana the way of farming, and collected tributes (kaico called in G//ui and G//ana) such as ostrich feathers and eggs, hides of games, and brought them to Molepolole. While he was alive, the Tswana are also said to have visited the Central Kalahari to see Keigyom and to hunt together with him. There is a story that they visited even Maun on foot to obtain axes made from vehicle springs.

There is no strong evidence at present, about when this relation with the Tswana started. It may be around the beginning of the 20th century, if the current chief is indeed third generation, and if Keigyom was still alive in this area at the time of the locust swarm of 1924-1925 (Osaki, 1995). Therefore, the stereotype about G//ana Bushmen that “they hardly had kept in touch with other societies, and they had live self-sufficient life, their traditional life style of hunting and gathering, for a long time (Tanaka, 1980)” should be adjusted (Osaki, 1995).

2. G//ui and the Kgalagadi

The G//ui relations with the Kgalagadi and the Tswana have seldom been investigated, and I will thus describe the outline of this relationship in this subsection. Like Keigyom of G//ana, there was also a man named “Kiroo,” who was a Kgalagadi and had a close relation to the G//ui. He is said to have been from Tsetseng, to have had his own field in Kaocue, and to have bred goats and donkeys. He married some G//ui women, and often took tributes (kaico) to the Kalahari chief in Tesetseng. His descendants were also fairly hardworking, engaged in agriculture and livestock farming. Kiroo may have been a contemporary of Keigyom, but the details about his life is not clear.

In 1928, B. Clifford, the Secretary of the United Kingdom, traveled through the Central Kalahari on an inspection tour. According to the record of the trip, the Kgalagadi tribe and Bushmen were then living in the villages inside the current Central Kalahari Game Reserve, such as Kikao, Molape, Kaotwe, Chukudu, Kukomo, and Kgomodimo, and tributes were being levied for the Kwena chief (Ramsay, 1989: 92). In 1930, the Vernay-Lang Kalahari Expedition of the South African Transvaal Museum also recorded passing through a village called Kaotwe. The area Kaotwe in the documents left in the museum may be identical to Kaocue, where Kiroo had his fields.

Bushmen say that they brought tributes to the chief of a Kgalagadi village, which was located in Tsetseng, the southwest of Kaocue, and that the chief was called Puwache (notation based on the Bushmen pronunciation), who also brought the tributes to the chief of Letlhken, named Seloilwe. According to the report by Captain Beeching, who accompanied the Vernay-Lang Kalahari Expedition in 1930, the Kalahari tribe in Kaocue brought tributes to the chief of Letlhken, Seloilwe, who then sold them to the shops in Molepolole. Such stories and other documents show that Puwache must have been identical to Pechwe, who became the chief in 1935.

It is said that Puwache even visited Central Kalahari to levy tributes, and that his son owned a horse and hunted on horseback. Hunting on horseback is now popular as a method of hunting in the Central Kalahari. Besides, the Kalahari people in Salajwe also visited Central Kalahari to hunt on horseback.
Keigyom and Kiroo may have been contemporaries in the first half of the 20th century. Around that period, Bechuanaland, the preserve territory of the United Kingdom, was established, and the government of the preserve territories and the ruling class of the Tswana tribe were trying to improve the governing organization.

DISCUSSION

I. Importance of the Bushmen’s Oral Traditions

“Rashomon” is a movie produced by Akira Kurosawa, one of his most important works that won acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival. In the movie, each testimony of the victim, assailant, and witness in an incident vary, because the three based on different grounds. Each of the perspectives of the Bushmen’s and the Tswana’s oral traditions, and the official government documents are original, as long as they were independently formed. In particular, it is not easy to talk frankly about the delicate issues of relationships concerning dominance and dependence. Therefore, the old Bushman tales do not necessarily tell historical facts. Leacock and Lee (1982) argued that foraging societies can only be understood as the product of a triple dynamic: first, the internal dynamic of communal foraging relations of production; second, the dynamics of their historical interactions with farmers, herders, and states; and third, the dynamic of articulation and incorporation within the modern world system. Thus, it is necessary to collect oral traditions to reconstruct their rich heritage, because the Tswana oral tradition and the official documents of the government have been researched, whereas the old Bushman tales have not been studied except by Solway and Lee (1990).

In the Bushmen society, the oral tradition does not exist as a system while it does in the Bantu society. Only individual Bushman memories can become data for historical research. The oldest of the Bushmen in the Central Kalahari is about 70 years old. Even if he remembers his father’s stories, we can only collect old stories of the past 100 years. Although the youth may sometimes be interested in such old stories, their major concern is elsewhere, about some other things of a more immediate concern. The surviving informant is so old that recording his stories requires urgency.

II. Were Bushmen Dominated by Tswana?

Bushmen used to pay tributes to the Tswana, and as a consequence, the Tswana believed that they were dominant to Bushmen. On the other hand, Bushmen do not think that they were dominated by the Tswana. First of all, Bushmen perceived the tributes as a part of trading. The ostrich feathers and hides of game were “tributes” to the Tswana, for which they were given gun powder, bullets for firearms, and tobacco in return. That is, since Bushmen did want such goods, they paid the “tributes” to the Tswana.
Secondly, it was only the chief and his family who owned goats, engaged themselves in farming, and hunted with firearms, and paid tributes as a leader to the Tswana, while most G//ui and G//ana Bushmen had no direct contact in paying the tributes.

When I was listening to the informant telling stories about the tribute system, he said, "Some say, kaico, kaico, but I hate kaico," recalling the past. The tribute system itself did not necessarily come to stay in the Bushmen society.

It is said that Tswana stopped visiting Central Kalahari after Keigyom died. It means that G//ui and G//ana Bushmen were not placed in the Tswana dominant structure, but that they had a relationship with the Tswana only through the medium of Keigyom and his descendants. The tribute system itself died out, partly because it was prohibited by the protectorate government. New production systems such as agriculture and livestock farming were introduced to the Bushmen society, but few Bushmen embraced them. In spite of newly gained technological knowledge, Bushmen still choose to live on hunting and gathering besides small-scale farming that was so dependent upon decent rainfall in the Central Kalahari.

In short, even if a Tswana man settled down and were accepted as the chief (ayako), he neither gained great power nor embodied the power of the Tswana Kingdom himself. Yet, the Tswana perceived themselves as dominant to the Bushmen, who in turn did not perceive likewise and lived as "free persons in bushes." Such a difference in the viewpoints has still remained until now. During the later colonial era to the establishment of modern independent Botswana, Bushmen were continuously deprived of their living sphere, and they were obliged to the lowest class ranking as a minority in Botswana.

III. Various Relationships Between the Tswana and Bushmen

The relations between the Bushmen and the Tswana were diverse (Fig. 2): the two peoples were sometimes masters and serfs, and sometimes on fairly equal terms in trade. My conclusion is that the Tswana power did not reach the Central Kalahari but only a part of the relationship between the Tswana and the Bushman was influenced by it. The Tswana power could not reach the Central Kalahari only because of its remoteness. But in places where the two people were in proximity, Bushmen lived like serfs. The Tswana power was limited because unlike modern states, they had not developed infrastructure such as the traffic system to expand over the territories. In remote regions, Bushmen maintained their cultural originality with only partial influence from the Tswana.

In this paper I did not deal with the oral tradition of the Tswana. For the accurate reconstruction of the diversity of ethnic relationships in the Kalahari, the historical research is needed on the Tswana and the Kgalagadi, which forms the next subject to be studied.
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